

Calling Matthew

The gospel for this coming Sunday (Second Sunday after Pentecost) is Matthew 9:9-13. This text is about Jesus calling Matthew to be his disciple.

In the previous reading Jesus had left the region of the Gadarenes where he did cast demons into the pigs and was asked to leave. He got off of the boat on Capernaum and healed the paralytic man.

After the healing, Jesus sees Matthew sitting at the tax booth. This tax booth was possibly on the border between the territories of Philip and Herod Antipas, where commercial tolls were levied. Matthew's administrative occupation likely helped prepare him for writing his Gospel.

Jesus calls for Matthew to follow him. People in Jesus' day would listen to a number of teachers and then follow the one whose ideas they liked the best. This is not how Jesus does things. He does the choosing. In this case he found Matthew and asked him to bring his friends.

The "tax gatherers" mentioned in the Gospels were probably engaged in the collection of indirect taxes, that is, customs and sales taxes on commerce as it changed hands and as it passed by toll booths in towns such as Capernaum. Direct taxes on persons and land were collected by government officials, and it is possible that Matthew was one such individual.

In contrast to those who only volunteered to follow Jesus (8:19–22), Matthew responded immediately to Jesus' call.

When it speaks of "sinners" there were surely those people in first-century Judaism who more flagrantly and publicly violated the Law of God. Dishonest or extorting tax gatherers would be among that group of "sinners," but others would be there as well, likely including prostitutes. It would include some of the people who despised the Pharisees' interpretations and applications of Scripture. The Pharisees rules were very legalistic approach which condemned just about everyone who didn't agree with them.

Indeed, all people were sinners and all were in need of the saving work of Jesus, who had come, and who was to be named Jesus, because "he himself will save his people [all, not just some of them!] from their sins" (1:21). We, too, are sinners and are need of a Savior.

To eat with someone was a powerful message of acceptance, trust and the partnership of fellowship which also included a sense of intimacy and familiarity. Jesus took a huge risk here because it indicated that he was someone who hung around with a rough and wicked crowd. In the Lord's Supper we experience the acceptance Christ has for us. The faith he gave us brings about this acceptance. The Lord's Supper is also a reminder of the feast that is to come when we join him in heaven.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, thank You for inviting me, a sinner, to your marriage supper. Amen. (TLSB)